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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001662

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, DRL
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: IRC AT WITS' END AT REGIME ATTRITION TACTICS

REF: KHARTOUM 1579

11. (SBU) Summary: While presenting a surface image of humanitarian cooperation, Sudanese authorities have succeeded in constraining IRC operations in Darfur to the point that the organization is tentative about its future in Sudan, IRC staff told CDA. With stay permits granted for only one quarter of its program staff, and continued government meddling in IRC affairs, the international humanitarian organization has received new obstacles in place of access, and threats in place of dialogue while HAC officials pay lip service to both the spirit and letter of the 2007 Joint Communiqué. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On November 12 CDA Fernandez met with Justine Brett (protect), Program Director for International Rescue Committee (IRC) Sudan, and Alan Paul (protect), Deputy Director of Programs for Darfur, to discuss continued Sudanese bureaucratic impediments to IRC's operations in Sudan. According to Brett, the Government of Sudan (GoS) has steadfastly refused to grant stay permits and Darfur travel permits to most of IRC's international staff, especially those who come from Western countries, leading the NGO to despair about its future in Sudan. IRC is hemorrhaging staff as the GoS has informally denied stay permits for both Brett and Paul; IRC's Darfur health advisor; its Darfur capacity-building manager; its deputy director of field operations; and its Darfur-based security manager. Additionally, IRC's Child and Youth Program Advisor was forced to leave Sudan on November 7 due to the government's refusal to grant a stay permit. Currently, only three out of IRC's twelve Darfur program staff have stay permits and continue running IRC's day-today operations in Darfur. However, even the three staff members who have thus far avoided the government's harassment could be forced to leave Sudan on or by January 31, 2009 when the Moratorium on Restrictions a.k.a. "Fast Track" expires. "At the moment we can still guarantee program quality, but it's getting more and more constrained," Brett said of the regime's "expulsion by attrition" strategy.

13. (SBU) As part of the GoS's "successful wearing-down strategy," as Brett described it, the GoS Humanitarian Affairs Committee (HAC) has entangled itself even further in IRC operations in Khartoum and throughout Darfur. Currently, the HAC is haggling with IRC over the content of technical agreements within each state in Darfur to extract major concessions unfavorable to the NGO. And although IRC continues to implement its water and sanitation program and health program in Darfur, they do so with no technical agreements having yet been signed by the HAC. Brett remains concerned that the HAC intends to bully IRC into signing technical agreements that, should IRC conclude it is unable to operate in Darfur, will give HAC permission to seize IRC assets in Darfur, including vehicles, computers and satellite phones. Paul predicted that IRC could continue to deliver services in Darfur for one to three months following the departure of international staff, "but it leads us to the question of what IRC stands for."

14. (SBU) Government-controlled newspapers in Khartoum have begun a coordinated campaign linking UNAMID and the IRC with the International Criminal Court (ICC) (reftel). For example, on October 28 Akhir Lahza published a 2005 internal memo, now discarded and discredited by IRC, which suggested that the NGO cooperated with the ICC. Brett said her office submitted to the HAC a simple press statement on IRC's mandate and details of its programs in Sudan, but the HAC refused to permit release of the press statement to the media. The HAC agreed to call off the defamation campaign now once the damage has already been done.

15. (SBU) Brett and Paul agreed that at this sensitive moment, IRC would not be keen for Post to release its own press release on IRC's operations but asked that the international community keep pressing the authorities on humanitarian access. They noted that if the regime can do this with a large, well-respected, US-based NGO, they can do so with anyone. They noted that pressure from CDA Fernandez and UK Special Envoy O'Niell in October had resulted in the authorities agreeing to talk to IRC again and to take a few cosmetic steps, but there has been no change in the inherently hostile and legalistic attitude of the HAC. The authorities realize that outright expulsion has negative consequences so they pursue this strategy of attrition to wear down aid workers and the institutions themselves.

16. (SBU) Yet as IRC prepares for contingencies that include shuttering its programs in Sudan, complications inherent in cooperating with GoS authorities show that leaving Sudan will also be fraught with difficulty. Brett reported that in October, internal downsizing of its Nyala program forced IRC to let go of seven drivers, but the South Darfur HAC intervened and claimed that

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IRC could not lay-off any local employees (in the end IRC got its way.) Additionally, IRC is caught in the catch-22 that even if it does choose to depart Sudan, technically it cannot; with pending legal cases before Sudanese courts, IRC legally must remain in Sudan until those cases are resolved.

17. (SBU) Comment: As IRC's case sadly highlights, the government of Sudan has been spectacularly successful in contracting humanitarian access in Darfur to the point that NGOs spend their time investigating ways to protect their assets in the field and respond to bureaucratic demands instead of implementing programs to reduce suffering in Darfur. As part of its orchestrated campaign to keep the pressure on NGOs, the GoS is meticulously and slowly squeezing out from Darfur the international staff most technically-qualified to implement humanitarian aid programs, forcing NGOs to decide between closing out their programs or providing poor quality assistance. Even if the government proceeds with the November 25 renewal of the Moratorium on Restrictions (which we expect them to do as a highly publicized gesture towards UN U/S for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes), post is skeptical that the GoS is serious about assisting international NGOs in Darfur anytime soon, despite its claims to the contrary at the Sudan People's Initiative. They will certainly refrain from overtly and openly hostile acts, such as expulsions, while seeking to accomplish the same results a little bit at a time all the while presenting the veneer of an (eventually hollowed out) international humanitarian presence.

FERNANDEZ